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BY THE HOUSE OF DELEGATES,

March 3d, 1848.

Read and ordered to be printed.

REPORT

OF THE

SELECT COMMITTEE,

IN RELATION TO A

SYSTEM OF REGISTRATION

OF

BIRTHS, DEATHS AND MARRIAGES.

REPORT.

The select committee to which was referred the subject of the establishing of a general system for the registration of births, marriages and deaths throughout the State, reports

That a similar committee was appointed at the last session of the legislature, which owing to the lateness of the session at which the subject was introduced, failed to perfect and report a bill.

The following letter addressed to the chairman of that committee, by Dr. Wynne, of Baltimore, through whose instrumentality the enquiry was originally brought before the legislature embraces many reasons for the enactment of a law for the registration of births, deaths, marriages, and is herewith submitted for your consideration.

35 NORTH LIBERTY STREET, Baltimore,
18th February, 1847.

SIR,—Your letter of the 11th instant, informing me of the appointment of a select committee for the purpose of enquiring into the expediency of establishing a uniform system of registration of births, deaths and marriages throughout the State, and asking information as to the best plan to answer the ends contemplated by the resolution has been received.

As this subject is one which has occupied a good share of my attention for some years, the committee will excuse me for offering some reasons why the resolution should give birth to a permanent law.

It may truly be said that each age has its peculiar characteristics, giving a coloring and stamp to the actions of men; at one time manifesting itself in the most wild and fanciful speculations; at another requiring even more than ordinary evidence to win it from incredulity. The present age partakes of neither of these two extremes, but pursues a middle course, and is ready and eager to seize on such new facts as come to it with a reasonable amount of

proof to sustain them. It is a practical age, and consequently an age of great improvement. A quarter of a century has scarcely elapsed since the rude hand loom gave place to the beautiful one now in use in manufactories, or the ordinary mode of spinning to the jenny of Sir Richard Arkwright, by which labor has been multiplied, in its results many hundred fold. Within that period a locomotive on the Baltimore and Ohio rail road for the purpose of motive power was spoken of as a chimera, which could hardly be realized, and at the present moment we pass through almost every portion of this State, behind this iron couser, at a speed, and with a power at that time considered impossible to attain, and the winged lightning as it darts through the sky is scarce more rapid, than the transmission of our thoughts in legible characters from place to place by means of the electro-magnetic telegraph. It remained for the last five years to demonstrate, that the wide waste of waters which separate this continent from Europe, could be navigated by steam, and for the last year practically to show that the intelligence thus received, could be simultaneously communicated in the space of a few minutes from Boston to New York, Philadelphia, Baltimore and Washington, although so distant from each other.

These are some of the prominent movements which characterize the age, and which are not confined to a few such striking developments as I particularized, but extend to all the concerns of mankind. Agriculture, manufactures and commerce, are not what they once were, but have received an impetus from a series of new discoveries, and an accumulation of hitherto unrecorded facts, which place them far in advance of what they were in the days of our forefathers.

That these results more especially in the humbler departments, have been mainly produced from a well digested series of statistical information, none will pretend to deny. and even in the higher walks of scientific pursuit it has ever required an accumulation of facts to serve as a basis for splendid discoveries. Newton only laid the true foundation for the movements of the heavenly bodies on the accumulating materials of the centuries in which Copernicus, and other astronomers had enriched science by their labors.

The saying is as true as it is old, that "*figures cannot lie,*" and in no branch of enquiry is this axiom more fully verified than the one which at present occupies the mind of the committee. Human life is governed by certain fixed laws. These laws are demonstrable by figures,—by carefully observed phenomenon—by a series of statistics. Thus, we are enable to say in advance that the number of deaths from consumption in Baltimore, will be equal to about one-sixth of the whole mortality, that the entire number of deaths, in a week, or month, or year, will be equal to a certain per centage of the whole population, and that this per centage will be increased or diminished by the operation of certain physical causes, or modes of life.

The committee under their instructions have two distinct enqui-

ries to make. 1st. The practicability of establishing an uniform system for the registration of birth, deaths, marriages throughout the State. And 2nd. The advantages likely to flow from such a system to the entire community composing the State, and

1st. As to the practicability of establishing an uniform system for the registration of births, deaths and marriages throughout the State.

The system proposed by the resolution is not a new one, but has been in use under various modifications, either in whole or in part, for the last half century in most of the civilized governments of the world. Of late years, however, it has undergone improvements in England and France particularly, which serve immensely to increase its usefulness and benefits to mankind. England, France, Russia, Prussia, Norway, Sweden, Denmark, and indeed all the principle countries of Europe have permanent systems established for the purpose of a correct enumeration of the births, deaths, marriages, occurring among their population. In Boston, New York, Philadelphia, Baltimore, Washington and the other large cities of the United States, an imperfect organization, defective and unsatisfactory in its results has for a long period obtained. The feasibility of the plan as adapted to this country has thus long been acknowledged, and imperfectly acted upon. Its results are only unsatisfactory, because they required more extended powers and a greater concert of action.

The State of Massachusetts has had for several years past a registration law in operation, from which the most important results have already been derived. The legislatures of New York, Pennsylvania, and others, have reported bills of registration, and in the march of improvement it must become in a few years a universal system throughout the Union.

2nd. As to the advantages likely to flow from such a system to the entire community composing the State.

One of the most prominent features of this registration will be to disclose the number of deaths which occur in every part of the State, and their causes. In this manner the healthiness or unhealthiness of any particular district, will be determined by authority which will admit of no dispute, and if causes are in operation of a local nature, inducing disease, they will be discovered, and the proper remedy applied for their removal. Thus in some portions of the State malarial diseases are annual visitants. A comparison of the returns from every portion of the State will point out these localities, record will be made for the causes, and these in process of time will be removed. By this mode the registration act will tend directly to the promotion of health, and the removal of disease; again, it is a well ascertained fact, that while certain mountainous countries are healthy, others are exceedingly detrimental to health. If any such are inhabited within the limits of the State, and I am aware of the existence of some, their comparative unhealthiness will be ascertained, and such modes advised as will render them fitter abodes for man.

In a large portion of the State the eye rests upon waste fields, or inhabited by a sparse population. Why is this? Because the soil is unproductive, or the price of agricultural products small? Certainly not, for in both of these particulars Maryland is not behind her sister states, but because they too frequently possess a reputation for unhealthiness, and this in many instances without any just foundation. The reputation, however, clings to them, and will never be eradicated until a comparison made between them and other localities will exhibit incontestably this fallacy. Long ere this the waste lands in Calvert county would have been settled by an industrious German colony, if their agent could have proved to them its healthiness.

Now, suppose that by means of the data furnished by the registration laws of each of the States, and in the march of improvement as we before stated, this system must become universal in this country, it should be ascertained that two States in the Union were eminently favorable to the two extreme periods of life, infancy and old age, and that the probabilities of life were far greater in them than elsewhere. Is it not reasonable to imagine that in the eager pursuit after health, which causes men to brave the dangers of the sea, and live in foreign countries, enduring a voluntary exile from their own home, valetudinarians would resort to them from all other parts of our common country?

I have already made a careful analysis of the census of the United States, and find that Maryland and Virginia, are far more favorable to these two periods of life than the other States, and I am satisfied that when these facts, and others which will be developed by the registration act, shall become known, they will do more to increase their population, and restore to tillage and value their waste lands, than any other measure which could be devised. The wealthy inhabitants from the north and the south, tempted by the mildness of their climate, and the salubrity of their soil would resort thither for the purpose of obtaining that health, denied them in less favored spots.

I might adduce many other arguments in favor of the passage of a registration law, but I fear to weary your patience and therefore forbear.

I am sir, with sentiments of respect,

Your obedient servant,

JAMES WYNNE, M. D.

JOHN PATTERSON, Esq., Chairman,

Of the Select Committee to enquire into the propriety of a Registration Act.

In addition to the arguments above adduced, the committee will briefly indicate, a few of the many results which have been obtained in other countries from this system. The relative progress of population, a question of much importance in a political aspect, here meets with a satisfactory answer. In this field there have been many observers, and although the deductions from a few particular

tables, might be considered as uncertain, yet the multiplicity of persons engaged in the observation, the long lapse of time, and the zeal with which the enquiries have been prosecuted, places the genuineness of their deductions, beyond a question of controversy. The number of births in the city of Paris, during the space of a century, from 1710 to 1818, amounted to 1,931,897, and the number of deaths during the same period to 1,935,579. Villermé has ascertained that whenever the political disturbances, which so frequently agitated Paris, or any other moral or physical evil of magnitude occurred, the deaths were increased, while the births were diminished, thus curtailing the mean duration of human life. The history and development of disease, the value of medical treatment, the period of the invasion of Epidemics, (one of which, the desolating Cholera, seems even now to be impending over us,) the influence of situation in its development, and the modes of life found most conducive to health, are enquiries here satisfactorily developed.

Registration as applied to the United States, becomes a question of great importance in another point of view. It not only determines questions of much moment of a domestic nature, but it also furnishes the means by which to establish a just comparison between European institutions and our own. As determining claims to property, in the management of law-suits, and family questions of vital interest to their happiness; these public records acquire an importance, the value of which will be readily acknowledged by every one.

“The tabular abstracts of the returns, also, are not matters of mere speculative curiosity, they are not only useful in determining difficult questions in economical science, but they become the actual basis of legislation, and of the proceedings of individuals and joint stock companies, the value of a widow’s dower, or a life estate, which our judicial tribunals have frequent occasion to determine, can only be ascertained by reference to these tables. The direct practical effect of important measures of legislation, and divers projects of philanthropic reform, in the well being and increase of population, can only be ascertained by the aid of such tables.”—*American Almanac for 1846*, page 154.

Our own general government, imitating the example of the great European nations, has not hesitated to become possessed, at great expense, of those statistics immediately connected with political economy, but if the demands of science, or the political wants of a nation require the aid of statistics, of how much greater importance do they become when applied to the development of the history of the human race, in health and disease: that human race, in the advancement of whose condition consists the whole theory and basis of legislative action.

In England where the registration system now prevails, and where “*sanitary reform has now taken its place as the great question of the day*,”* it has been ascertained that the present

* *Medico Chirurgical Review for 1848*, Vol. 1, p. 1.

rate of mortality is one in (44.55) a little more than every forty-four inhabitants. Now, from a most careful examination of the facts by the committees appointed by the Crown, and by health of town associations, it is proved that the annual rate of mortality need not differ from two per cent., or one death to every fifty inhabitants. They therefore charge upon the Parliament of England the destitution of sixty thousand inhabitants annually, for the want of proper sanitary measures. Such facts as these, which cannot be controverted, have aroused the whole English nation to the importance of sanitary enactments.

In the United States, with no overgrown metropolis like London, nor large manufacturing towns like Manchester, nor depraved under-ground population like Liverpool, but with the elements of greater healthiness, it is ascertained that the rate of mortality is one in every (44.60) forty-four inhabitants, differing but a small fraction from the mortality of a country where sixty thousand persons are annually sacrificed by deficient legislative action. If this reasoning be true, and it challenges contradiction, then the United States is chargeable with the sacrifice of one hundred thousand lives annually, and the State of Maryland two thousand five hundred out of this number, for the want of proper sanitary measures.

This question presents itself to the consideration of the legislature as a great national measure, advocated in the most earnest manner by those best qualified to judge of its merits. At a late session of the Medical Convention convened at Philadelphia, and composed of eminent medical men from every State in the Union, this question formed an important topic of discussion, and a series of resolutions, directing its members to use their influence in their respective States to procure the passage of registration laws—and in compliance with this appeal, bills of a similar character have been reported to several of the legislatures of the Union.

Fully concurring in the importance of the measure, the committee therefore report a bill.

WM. P. WHYTE,
CHAS. R. HOWARD,
J. T. B. DORSEY.

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BY THE HOUSE OF DELEGATES,

March 4th, 1848.

Read and ordered to be printed.

REPORT

OF THE

SELECT COMMITTEE,

IN RELATION TO THE

INSPECTION OF TOBACCO

IN THE

STATE TOBACCO WAREHOUSES.
